

Lake County News Sun, August 24, 2007

They were cranking out sandbags behind Gurnee Grade School on Kilbourne Road, and the new school superintendent was dripping with sweat as he helped sandbag the school.

Residents along Kilbourne Road and Emerald Avenue were picking up sandbags, and business along Old Grand Avenue were also sandbagging their buildings as authorities warned that with more rain Thursday night the Des Plaines River could crest at 11 feet Saturday afternoon.

At Tranquility Hair Salon on Old Grand, owner Greg Percival wasn't taking any chances.

He and staff cleared out roughly \$50,000 worth of equipment in anticipation of flooding.

"It's frustrating. You got to interrupt business, pack everything up, put it on a truck and then come back four days later and do it all in reverse," said Percival, who is missing a trip to Cancun to stay back and monitor his shop.

Percival opened his salon at the former location of the Jandee Salon just months after Gurnee's last major flood in 2004. He said he was aware that the area was prone to flooding, but he was told it only happened every 12 years or so.

At Gurnee Grade School, Superintendent John Hutton has only been on the job for eight weeks, and he was getting a baptism by sand Thursday morning as he joined more than 80 volunteers from the community and school who were sandbagging Gurnee Grade School.

"I don't think this can be replicated in a lot of other communities," he said, clearly impressed

with the operations.

"I knew the history here, but I didn't expect it so soon," he said.

"OK, we're back to it," he said as another cart of sandbags arrived to build a four-foot wall around the school. "Our plans right now is to start school on time," he said, referring to Tuesday's start date.

The Gurnee Park District cancelled all events at Viking Park this weekend because of flooding.

According to Pat Muetz, assistant to the Gurnee village administrator, predictions of the river's crest have ranged from 9.7 to 11 feet by Saturday morning. It all depends on how much rain there is Thursday night, Friday and Friday evening.

In Wadsworth, sand is being provided to the Oak Knoll subdivision off Delany Road, where several residents are sandbagging their homes against the rising water.

At Libertyville Estates near Libertyville, the water level around the levee has begun to rise, and public works personnel continue to monitor the situation. Plans call for allowing some accumulation of water inside the levee as the river rises outside of it to equalize hydrostatic pressure across the levee.

Residents who live inside the levee should understand that some water accumulation along the inside of the levee is expected and will help protect the integrity of the levee as water rises outside of it.

The Lake County Emergency Management Agency is working on a disaster declaration for the county, and the county EOC will be partially staffed in support of this event.

On Thursday, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, called officials at Naval Station Great Lakes to enlist the help of sailors as Gurnee attempts to protect buildings near the river. Approximately 200 sailors are expected to help protect homes and businesses today.